Cycling - health benefits
Cycling can help to protect you from serious diseases such as stroke, heart attack, some cancers, depression, diabetes, obesity and arthritis.

Riding a bike is healthy, fun and a low-impact form of exercise for all ages.

Cycling is easy to fit into your daily routine by riding to the shops, park, school or work.

To be fit and healthy you need to be physically active. Regular physical activity can help protect you from serious diseases such as obesity, heart disease, cancer, mental illness, diabetes and arthritis. Riding your bicycle regularly is one of the best ways to reduce your risk of health problems associated with a sedentary lifestyle.

Cycling is a healthy, low-impact exercise that can be enjoyed by people of all ages, from young children to older adults. It is also fun, cheap and good for the environment.

Riding to work or the shops is one of the most time-efficient ways to combine regular exercise with your everyday routine. An estimated one billion people ride bicycles every day – for transport, recreation and sport.

Cycling for health and fitness

It only takes two to four hours a week to achieve a general improvement to your health. Cycling is:

- Low impact – it causes less strain and injuries than most other forms of exercise.
- A good muscle workout – cycling uses all of the major muscle groups as you pedal.
- Easy – unlike some other sports, cycling does not require high levels of physical skill. Most people know how to ride a bike and, once you learn, you don’t forget.
- Good for strength and stamina – cycling increases stamina, strength and aerobic fitness.
- As intense as you want – cycling can be done at very low intensity to begin with, if recovering from injury or illness, but can be built up to a demanding physical workout.
- A fun way to get fit – the adventure and buzz you get from coasting down hills and being outdoors means you are more likely to continue to cycle regularly, compared to other physical activities that keep you indoors or require special times or places.
- Time-efficient – as a mode of transport, cycling replaces sedentary (sitting) time spent driving motor vehicles or using trams, trains or buses with healthy exercise.

Health benefits of regular cycling

Cycling is mainly an aerobic activity, which means that your heart, blood vessels and lungs all get a workout. You will breathe deeper, perspire and experience increased body temperature, which will improve your overall fitness level.

The health benefits of regular cycling include:

- increased cardiovascular fitness
- increased muscle strength and flexibility
- improved joint mobility
- decreased stress levels
- improved posture and coordination
- strengthened bones
- decreased body fat levels
- prevention or management of disease
- reduced anxiety and depression.

Cycling and specific health issues

Cycling can improve both physical and mental health, and can reduce the chances of experiencing many health problems.

Obesity and weight control

Cycling is a good way to control or reduce weight, as it raises your metabolic rate, builds muscle and burns body fat. If you’re trying to lose weight, cycling must be combined with a healthy eating plan. Cycling is a comfortable form of exercise and you can change the time and intensity – it can be built up slowly and varied to suit you.

Research suggests you should be burning at least 8,400 kilojoules (about 2,000 calories) a week through exercise. Steady cycling burns about 1,200 kilojoules (about 300 calories) per hour.

If you cycle twice a day, the kilojoules burnt soon add up. British research shows that a half-hour bike ride every day will burn nearly five kilograms of fat over a year.

Cardiovascular disease and cycling

Cardiovascular diseases include stroke, high blood pressure and heart attack. Regular cycling stimulates and improves your heart, lungs and circulation, reducing your risk of cardiovascular diseases.

Cycling strengthens your heart muscles, lowers resting pulse and reduces blood fat levels. Research also shows that people who cycle to work have two to three times less exposure to pollution than car commuters, so their lung function is improved. A Danish study conducted over 14 years with 30,000 people aged 20 to 93 years found that regular cycling protected people from heart disease.

Cancer and cycling

Many researchers have studied the relationship between exercise and cancer, especially colon and breast cancer. Research has shown that if you cycle, the chance of bowel cancer is reduced. Some evidence suggests that regular cycling reduces the risk of breast cancer.

Diabetes and cycling

The rate of type 2 diabetes is increasing and is a serious public health concern. Lack of physical activity is thought to be a major reason why people develop this condition. Large-scale research in Finland found that people who cycled for more than 30 minutes per day had a 40 per cent lower risk of developing diabetes.

Bone injuries, arthritis and cycling

Cycling improves strength, balance and coordination. It may also help to prevent falls and fractures. Riding a bike is an ideal form of exercise if you have osteoarthritis, because it is a low-impact exercise that places little stress on joints.

Cycling does not specifically help osteoporosis (bone-thinning disease) because it is not a weight-bearing exercise.

Mental illness and cycling

Mental health conditions such as depression, stress and anxiety can be reduced by regular bike riding. This is due to the effects of the exercise itself and because of the enjoyment that riding a bike can bring.

Hand cycling and health

Hand cycles are similar to recumbent tricycles, but they are powered with hand instead of foot pedals. Velcro straps can be used to secure the hands to the pedals if necessary.

This style of tricycle allows amputees, people with spinal injuries and those recovering from certain conditions such as stroke to cycle as a form of exercise and recreation. Hand-cyclists get cardiovascular and aerobic benefits similar to those of other cyclists.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Bicycle Network Victoria Tel. (03) 8376 8888 or 1800 639 634 (for country callers)

Things to remember

- Cycling can help to protect you from serious diseases such as stroke, heart attack, some cancers, depression, diabetes, obesity and arthritis.
- Riding a bike is healthy, fun and a low-impact form of exercise for all ages.
- Cycling is easy to fit into your daily routine by riding to the shops, park, school or work.

References

- Chertok M, Sheppeard V, Rissel C, Voukelatos A, 2004, ‘Comparison of air pollution exposure for five commuting modes in Sydney – car, train, bus, bicycle and...

- Physical activity, Heart Foundation. More information here.

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More information

Keeping active

The following content is displayed as Tabs. Once you have activated a link navigate to the end of the list to view its associated content. The activated link is defined as Active Tab

- Keeping active basics
- Getting started
- Staying fit and motivated
- Exercise safety and injury prevention
- Healthy eating and exercise
- Keeping active throughout life
- Health conditions and exercise

Keeping active basics

- Balancing energy in and energy out
- Body mass index (BMI)
- Energy in food (kilojoules and calories)
- Exercise intensity
- Exercise in your local surroundings (video)
- Exercise - the low-down on hydration
- Exercise with a friend
- Fitness centres – how to choose one
- How to make exercise fun (slideshow)
- Kids and energy needs
- Personal trainers – how to choose one
- Physical activity for men
- Physical activity for seniors
- Physical activity for women

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• Physical activity - how to get active when you are busy

Even if you’re busy, you still need to find a way to be physically active...

• Physical activity - it's important

Just 30 minutes of moderate activity each day can improve your health and reduce the risk of developing certain conditions or diseases...

• Physical activity – setting yourself goals

When you’re trying to become more physically active, set realistic health and fitness goals...

• Physical activity - what’s your excuse?

There are many excuses we can come up with to avoid being active, but the truth is there is always a way to fit some physical activity into your day...

• Resistance training – health benefits

If you do resistance training repeatedly and consistently, your muscles become stronger...

• Secrets to healthy ageing (slideshow)

Experts say the key to living well into our 80s and 90s is making a commitment to live healthily. Check out these simple ideas and embrace your senior years!

Getting started

• Exercise programs

If you are unfamiliar with what is involved, starting an exercise program can be challenging...

• Exercise - the low-down on hydration

You need to drink enough and regularly to keep hydrated during exercise...

• Exercise with a friend

Exercise is important for your physical and mental health. Working out with a friend means you’re more likely to have fun and stick to your exercise plan...

• Gardening for children

Children can learn new skills, have fun and develop self-confidence when they grow their own plants...

• Gardening for health - starting out

Gardening is a healthy activity that can be enjoyed by everyone...

• Gardening for older people

Garden spaces and equipment can be modified or adapted to help older people enjoy gardening...

• Gardening safety

Gardening is an enjoyable form of exercise, but you need to take care...

• Getting active - tucker talk tips

The main thing is to choose physical activities that you enjoy and that you can stick to in the long term...

• How to make exercise fun (slideshow)

Many of us find it difficult to stick to some form of exercise, others don’t know where to start. Experts say the key to taking up or keeping to any form of physical activity is to have fun. Get off...

• Physical activity - choosing a provider

Choosing the right fitness centre or service provider requires some research...

• Physical activity – choosing the one for you

You are more likely to keep up a healthy lifestyle change if your chosen activity suits you...

• Physical activity for men

Many men are only motivated to become more active after they have a health scare...

• Physical activity for seniors

Physical activity can help older people maintain independence, recover from illness and reduce their risk of disease...

• Physical activity for women

If you can’t make the time to exercise for yourself, do it for your family...

• Physical activity - how to get active when you are busy
Even if you’re busy, you still need to find a way to be physically active.

- Physical activity – how to get started
  If you’ve been inactive and want to begin physical activity, see a doctor first.

- Physical activity - learn how to swim (video)
  Swimming is a great low-impact exercise for all ages and abilities. Australian marathon swimmer, Tammy Van Wisse shows ex-AFL (Australian Football League) player and coach, Tony Shaw some swimming.

- Physical activity - overcoming barriers (video)
  Former world aerobics champion, Sue Stanley shows us how to overcome common exercise excuses.

- Physical activity – setting yourself goals
  When you’re trying to become more physically active, set realistic health and fitness goals.

Staying fit and motivated

- 10 tips to plan your exercise
  Physical activity won’t just happen. Most activities require planning – starting and maintaining a physical activity program does too. Here are some tips for getting ready to exercise: Make:

- 10 tips to stay active year round
  Pick an activity you enjoy ... 10 tips to stay active year round.

- Exercise and mood
  Exercise can have an enormous impact on your mood. Not only can exercise help in treating depression, it can also prevent people from becoming depressed again. So it’s important to keep up an exercise.

- Exercise - everyday activities
  There are lots of everyday activities that provide an opportunity to be active and provide health benefits.

- Exercise in your local surroundings (video)
  Want to exercise, but find gyms boring or expensive? Sue Stanley and Shane Bilsborough team up to show you how to exercise indoors and outdoors using your local surroundings - whether it's running up:

- Exercise programs
  If you are unfamiliar with what is involved, starting an exercise program can be challenging.

- Exercise with a friend
  Exercise is important for your physical and mental health. Working out with a friend means you’re more likely to have fun and stick to your exercise plan.

- How to make exercise fun (slideshow)
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- Pets can make you healthy (video)
  Australians have one of the highest rates of pet ownership in the world.

- Physical activity – choosing the one for you
  You are more likely to keep up a healthy lifestyle change if your chosen activity suits you.

- Physical activity for men
  Many men are only motivated to become more active after they have a health scare.

- Physical activity for seniors
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- Physical activity for women
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• Physical activity - overcoming barriers (video)

Former world aerobics champion, Sue Stanley shows us how to overcome common exercise excuses.

• Physical activity – overcoming the barriers

If you think physical activity is boring, try exercising with a friend.

• Physical activity – staying active during summer (video)

Physical Activity and Fitness Trainer Sherri Bourne gives us some great tips for staying active over the summer months.

• Physical activity – staying motivated

Pick an exercise or fitness activity that appeals to you and suits your lifestyle.

• Physical activity – what's your excuse?

There are many excuses we can come up with to avoid being active, but the truth is there is always a way to fit some physical activity into your day.

• Stretching exercise in winter (video)

When starting out an exercise program, it’s really important to do a warm up and cool down before and after exercise.

Exercise safety and injury prevention

• 10 tips for safe stretching

Make stretching part of your life... 10 tips for safe stretching.

• 10 tips to exercise safely

Exercising regularly has wide-ranging physical, emotional and social health benefits. You need to exercise safely to remain healthy and injury-free. If it’s safe and painless, you’re more...

• Aerobics - preventing injury

Aerobics injuries are usually caused by trauma and overuse, but can be prevented by using the right techniques and equipment.

• Australian rules football - preventing injury

Australian rules football is a physical contact sport that often results in injuries from tackling, kicking, running and constant competition for the ball.

• Basketball - health benefits

Basketball is a sport enjoyed by people of all ages and abilities.

• Basketball - preventing injury

Basketball is a fast game with frequent and aggressive body contacts - injuries can and do occur.

• Canoeing and kayaking - health benefits

Canoeing and kayaking can be done as a hobby, a competitive sport or as a fun activity on holidays.

• Canoeing and kayaking - preventing injury

Careful preparation and the right equipment can help prevent canoeing and kayaking injuries.

• Cricket - health benefits

To play cricket you need to be fit and strong and have good hand-eye coordination and ball-handling skills.

• Cricket - preventing injury

Cricket is a very popular sport. Injuries are often caused by overuse, being struck by a cricket ball and falls.

• Cycling - preventing injury

You are much more likely to hurt yourself by falling off your bike or hitting a stationary object than colliding with another vehicle.

• Dance - health benefits

Dancing can be a fun way to stay fit for people of all ages and abilities.

• Dancing - preventing injury

Dancing is fun and a great form of exercise, but make sure you avoid injuries.

• Dog walking - the health benefits

If you are planning to buy a dog, make sure you choose a breed that's appropriate to your lifestyle.
Exercise safety

Training too hard or fast is a common cause of sports-related injuries.

Fishing - preventing injury

Never go fishing alone? always fish with someone else and, ideally, with two other people.

Golf - health benefits

Golf provides a stimulating challenge, combined with a healthy walk in pleasant surroundings.

Golf - preventing injury

The average golfer playing an 18-hole game walks about seven kilometres.

Heat stress and exercise

Heat stress occurs when sweat can't evaporate fast enough to keep the body sufficiently cool during physical activity.

How to survive a rip current (video)

Learn what to do if you find yourself in a rip current.

Healthy eating and exercise

Food for sport - tucker talk tips

Carbohydrate is the most important nutrient for athletes.

Secrets to healthy ageing (slideshow)

Experts say the key to living well into our 80s and 90s is making a commitment to live healthily. Check out these simple ideas and embrace your senior years!

Sporting performance and food

Good nutrition and a healthy diet are essential to improving your sports performance.

The amount of physical activity you need

It’s important for your health that you get enough physical activity every day, and that you limit your sedentary behaviour. But getting the amount of physical activity you need doesn’t have to be...

Keeping active throughout life

10 tips for active seniors

Stay independent for longer with regular exercise. 10 tips for active seniors.

Children - keeping them active

A young child is naturally active, so build upon their inclinations to use their body.

Exercise and stretching in the office (video)

Sitting behind a desk all day doesn't mean you can't exercise.

Gardens for all – a health activity

Gardening has many health and therapeutic benefits, and is an activity that most people can enjoy.

Getting active - tucker talk tips

The main thing is to choose physical activities that you enjoy and that you can stick to in the long term.

Healthy active Koori kids - tucker talk tips

Good nutrition and physical exercise help to keep Koori kids healthy and avoid diseases when they get older.

Healthy ageing – stay involved

Reach out to the world around you for fun, a sense of achievement, social contact and mental stimulation.

Healthy and active ageing

Being physically active, eating well, socialising and improving your health can help you live a healthy, happy and active life as you get older.

How to make exercise fun (slideshow)

Many of us find it difficult to stick to some form of exercise, others don’t know where to start. Experts say the key to taking up or keeping to any form of physical activity is to have fun. Get off...

How to volunteer and boost your health (slideshow)

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Volunteering is great for our health – it makes us feel good, while helping others in the process.

- Older people in hospital – Get well soon
  Learn about improving and maintaining your health during a hospital stay.

- Parent's guide for active girls
  Physical activity is an important part of health and wellbeing, and girls should remain active as they grow up.

- Physical activity for men
  Many men are only motivated to become more active after they have a health scare.

- Physical activity for seniors
  Physical activity can help older people maintain independence, recover from illness and reduce their risk of disease.

- Physical activity for seniors – Staying active during summer (video)
  Physical Activity and Fitness Trainer, Sherri Bourne shares a few easy and low-impact ways for seniors to stay healthy over the summer months.

- Physical activity for women
  If you can't make the time to exercise for yourself, do it for your family.

- Physical activity - what's your excuse?
  There are many excuses we can come up with to avoid being active, but the truth is there is always a way to fit some physical activity into your day.

- Postnatal exercise
  Always consult with your doctor or midwife before starting any postnatal exercise program.

- Pregnancy and exercise
  Unless you have complications, you should be able to exercise throughout your pregnancy.

- Secrets to healthy ageing (slideshow)
  Experts say the key to living well into our 80s and 90s is making a commitment to live healthily. Check out these simple ideas and embrace your senior years!

- Sport and children
  Make sure that some family outings offer opportunities for physical activity, such as playing sport together.

- The amount of physical activity you need
  It’s important for your health that you get enough physical activity every day, and that you limit your sedentary behaviour. But getting the amount of physical activity you need doesn’t have to be...

- Vision loss and sport
  Many sports can be adapted to suit people who are blind or have low vision.

- Walking - the benefits for older people
  Walking is great exercise for older people. It has a range of health and social benefits, and most people can do it.

Health conditions and exercise

- Arthritis and exercise
  Exercise can reduce some of the symptoms of arthritis, and improve joint mobility and strength.

- Asthma and exercise
  Exercise-induced asthma can be prevented with medication and by preparing for exercise and physical activity.

- Breathing problems and exercise
  A little physical activity and some breathing exercises can help people with lung disease.

- Cancer – exercise to help you cope
  People with cancer should be as physically active as their abilities and condition allow.

- Dementia - reducing your risk
  Adopting a 'brain healthy' lifestyle may reduce your risk of dementia in later life.

- Diabetes - issues for children and teenagers
  Many parents worry when their child with diabetes starts or returns to school.

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• Epilepsy and employment
  Many people living with epilepsy are successfully employed across a range of professional fields.

• Epilepsy and exercise
  It is rare for a person with epilepsy to have a seizure during physical activity, but you should always take safety precautions when exercising.

• Exercise and mood
  Exercise can have an enormous impact on your mood. Not only can exercise help in treating depression, it can also prevent people from becoming depressed again. So it’s important to keep up an exercise.

• Exercise in your local surroundings (video)
  Want to exercise, but find gyms boring or expensive? Sue Stanley and Shane Bilsborough team up to show you how to exercise indoors and outdoors using your local surroundings - whether it’s running up...

• HIV, hepatitis and sport
  People with HIV or hepatitis B or C participate in a wide range of sports without restrictions, and the risk of transmission to another player is extremely small.

• Menstruation - athletic amenorrhoea
  Women who are athletes or who exercise a lot on a regular basis are at risk of developing athletic amenorrhoea, which is the absence of periods.

• Osteoporosis and exercise
  Exercise can reduce the risk of fractures resulting from osteoporosis by both slowing the rate of bone loss, and reducing the person’s risk of falling by building muscle strength and improving balance.

• Sports injuries
  A sports injury may be more severe than you think.

• Type 2 diabetes - healthy eating and exercise (video)
  People with type 2 diabetes talk about positive lifestyle changes that improve their quality of life.

Related Information

• Older people in hospital – Get well soon
  Learn about improving and maintaining your health during a hospital stay.

• Running and jogging - health benefits
  Running helps build strong bones, strengthens muscles and helps maintain a healthy weight.

• Golf - health benefits
  Golf provides a stimulating challenge, combined with a healthy walk in pleasant surroundings.

• Swimming - health benefits
  Swimming is fun, and a great way to keep fit and make friends.

• Canoeing and kayaking - health benefits
  Canoeing and kayaking can be done as a hobby, a competitive sport or as a fun activity on holidays.

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Related information on other websites

• Health matters – Bicycle Network Victoria.

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